



STATE OF MICHIGAN  
NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION  
LANSING



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM  
GOVERNOR

March 8, 2004  
RESUBMITTED: April 12, 2004

Memorandum to the Natural Resources Commission:

SUBJECT: December Pheasant Season

Authority:

The Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, 1994 PA 451, as amended, authorizes the Director and the Commission to issue orders to manage wild animals in this state.

Discussion and Background:

The Natural Resources Commission (NRC) and the Department were asked to consider a proposal to extend the December pheasant season from December 15 to January 1 in Zone 3 of the Southern Lower Peninsula (SLP). The current December pheasant season closing date (December 15) and hunt area has remained unchanged since 1996.

The impact of December hunting on pheasant populations has been the subject of much debate, but few studies have been conducted to directly measure the impacts of December hunting seasons on pheasant abundance. While this debate continues, available research suggests that December pheasant hunting regulations are within limits that provide for a sustainable pheasant harvest. Midwest states with season closing dates later than Michigan include Wisconsin (December 31), Illinois (January 8, north zone; January 15, south zone), Ohio (January 4), Indiana (December 21), North Dakota (January 4), South Dakota (December 31), Nebraska (January 31), Iowa (January 10), Missouri (January 15), and Kansas (January 31).

Pheasant abundance is directly related to the availability of pheasant habitat. Part of the reason late December pheasant hunting has been controversial is that some individuals are concerned that birds will be flushed by hunters from high quality habitat to poor quality cover. It is feared that pheasants pushed into poor habitat will be more susceptible to mortality from predators and exposure to harsh weather conditions. Studies of pheasant and pheasant hunters have led biologists to conclude that hunting is not currently detrimental to pheasant populations when viewed from a regional perspective. High hunting pressure on small areas may temporarily reduce rooster pheasant numbers at those spots; however, as long as enough suitable habitat surrounds these areas, pheasant abundance will be maintained by movements from neighboring habitat. In the SLP, pheasant habitat is located primarily on private land where the landowner can provide or prevent pheasant hunting on their property as they see fit. In addition, landowners that develop habitat on their land for pheasants will have the opportunity to benefit from their

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habitat improvement efforts. Extending the season from December 15 to January 1 would have no detrimental impact on the pheasant population. Maintaining healthy grassland ecosystems or other winter cover near available food in landscapes with little forest cover (i.e.,  $\leq 10$  percent forest cover) provides the key to long-term maintenance of pheasant populations and pheasant hunting recreation.

A random sample of pheasant hunters selected for the small game harvest survey were asked whether they supported extending the late pheasant season until January 1 in the southeast Lower Peninsula (current Late Season Pheasant Hunting Area boundary). An estimated 57 percent of pheasant hunters approved and 28 percent disapproved of this season date extension.

The NRC Policy Committee on Wildlife Issues asked Wildlife Division to review various options for an extended December pheasant hunting season. The preferred option of the Wildlife Committee for consideration by the NRC involves extending the pheasant hunting season closing date from December 15 to January 1 (17-day extension) within the existing late season pheasant hunting area boundary. This option also removes the season limit on pheasant.

Recommendation:

This order was submitted for information only at the April 2004 meeting of the Natural Resources Commission. This item appeared in the April 26, 2004, Calendar and is eligible for approval on May 7, 2004. We are now recommending that it be acted upon at this meeting.

Rebecca A. Humphries, Chief	Alan Marble, Acting Chief	George E. Burgoyne, Jr.
Wildlife Division	Law Enforcement Division	Resource Management Deputy

I have analyzed and discussed these recommendations with staff and concur as to matters over which the Natural Resources Commission has authority.

K. L. Cool  
Director

# **WILDLIFE CONSERVATION ORDER**

## **Amendment No. 10 of 2004**

Under the authority of sections 40107 and 40113a, Act No. 451 of the Public Acts of 1994, as amended, being sections 324.40107 and 324.40113a of the Michigan Compiled Laws, the Natural Resources Commission and the Director of the Department of Natural Resources ordered that effective May 8, 2004, the following section of the Wildlife Conservation Order shall read as follows:

### **3.501 Pheasant hunting, open seasons; daily and possession limits.**

Sec. 3.501. (1) The open season for taking male pheasants in the zone 1 pheasant management unit, as described in section 12.750 of this order, shall be October 10 to October 31. The remaining portion of zone 1 shall be closed to the taking of pheasants.

(2) The open season for taking male pheasants in zones 2 and 3 shall be October 20 to November 14.

(3) The daily limit shall be 2 male pheasants and the possession limit shall be 4 male pheasants.

(4) The open season for taking pheasants of either sex by falconry shall be October 10 to October 31 in those portions of zone 1 open to pheasant hunting and shall be October 20 to February 28 in those portions of zones 2 and 3 open to pheasant hunting. The daily limit for pheasants of either sex taken by falconry shall be 2 pheasants, and the possession limit shall be 4.

(5) The open season for taking male pheasants in the December pheasant management unit, as described in section 12.750a of this order, shall be December 1 to January 1.

### **12.750a "December pheasant management unit" defined.**

Sec. 12.750a. "December pheasant management unit" means all of Barry, Branch, Calhoun, Clinton, Eaton, Gratiot, Hillsdale, Ionia, Ingham, Jackson, Lenawee, Livingston, Macomb, Monroe, Oakland, Shiawassee, St. Clair, Washtenaw, and Wayne counties, and those portions of Allegan, Bay, Genesee, Isabella, Kalamazoo, Kent, Lapeer, Mecosta, Midland, Montcalm, Saginaw, Sanilac, and St. Joseph counties, bounded by a line beginning at the junction of highway US-131 and the Indiana-Michigan border in St. Joseph county, then northerly on highway US-131 through St. Joseph, Kalamazoo, Allegan, Kent, and Montcalm counties to highway M-20 in Mecosta county, easterly on highway M-20 through Mecosta, Isabella, and Midland counties, continuing easterly on highway M-20 through the city of Midland (where highway M-20 is also known as business route US-10) to highway US-10 in Bay county, easterly on highway US-10 to highway I-75 (also known as US-23) in Bay county, southerly on highway I-75/US-23 through Saginaw county to highway I-69 in Genesee county, easterly on highway I-69 to highway M-24 in Lapeer county, northerly on highway M-24 to highway M-90 in Lapeer county, easterly on highway M-90 through Lapeer and Sanilac counties to the Lake Huron shoreline, southerly along the Lake Huron

shoreline to the St. Clair river, easterly to the international border (Michigan state border), southerly to the Ohio-Michigan border (including all of St. Clair, Macomb, Wayne and Monroe counties), westerly on the Ohio-Michigan and then Indiana-Michigan borders to the point of beginning.

Issued this 7<sup>th</sup> day of May, 2004.

Approved as to matters over which the Natural Resources Commission has authority.

Keith J. Charters, Chairman  
Natural Resources Commission

Approved as to matters over which the Director has authority.

K. L. Cool  
Director